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Comenius, Johann

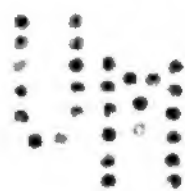
RULES OF LIFE.

BY

JOHN AMOS COMENIUS.

“Live while you live,” the epicure would say,
“And seize the pleasures of the present day.”
“Live while you live,” the sacred preacher cries,
“And give to God each moment as it flies.”
Lord, in my view, let both united be,
I live in pleasure when I live to Thee.

PHILIP DODDRIDGE.



LONDON:
WILLIAM MALLALIEU & CO.
97, HATTON GARDEN.
1865.

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THE EDITOR TO THE READER.

WHEN the venerable John Amos Comenius removed for a time from Lissa in Poland, to Elbing in Prussia, his fame attracted many students to the public grammar school, founded in the latter town by the Archduke Albert, in the year 1542, the parents of the wealthier pupils desiring him to impart private instruction to their children. But as the then law of the school was said to exclude its scholars from the advantages of tuition under private teachers, Comenius, who wished to be freed for the time from such employment, excused himself by a reference to that law. This induced one of the parents to seek the interference of the town council, under whose government the school appears to have been organised. His appeal was readily responded to, and the council, seconding the desire of the parent, Comenius was constrained to take the son under his care, who was the only youth favoured with the instruction of that most worthy man, during his abode at Elbing.

This youth, Christian Ambrose Koklewski (Cochlevius), to whom the following "Rules of Life" were addressed, was son of the appellant, the honourable Peter Koklewski, a native of Kuttenberg, in Bohemia, who, at the date of the appeal, fulfilled the high and responsible office of Royal Judge in the district of Breste (*Brestensis*), in the province of Lithuania, where the Polish Bible for Sarmatia was printed in 1563. The appeal, of which a copy is among the letters of Comenius, in the Royal Library of Prague, is dated at Norcium (*Nurek*), June the 27th, 1644; and included also a widowed sister's son, who probably, through the jealousy of the office-bearers in the school, was prevented from sharing in the requested privilege.

D. B.

18, Regent Square, W.C., London,
18th March, 1865.

LETTER
TO
D. CHRISTIAN AMBROSE KOCHLEWSKI.

“CHRIST IS OUR LIGHT.”

Generous youth, now a beloved disciple, and afterwards to be an esteemed friend; you have requested that,—as you are now about to leave my society and discipline, and soon to be among strangers,—you may have from my hand some memorial of my affection.

Why should you seek such an evidence of my love? If you have engraven on your heart my often iterated admonitions and the favour of the Divine blessing invoked upon you,—to which the truth of God may add its seal, as you truly purpose to continue in the ways of God,—what need is there of a memorial on paper?

That I may not, however, fail you in anything, I present you with this tablet, as a future directory of your actions, until, by being still more confirmed in goodness, you need no such aid.

Yours with sincere affection,

COMENIUS.

Written with a friendly hand and mind, on the 9th of June, 1645, being the day of your departure from me.

RULES OF LIFE.

1. FOR A WISE LIFE.
 2. FOR A HARMONIOUS LIFE.
 3. FOR A TRANQUIL LIFE.
 4. FOR AN ACTIVE LIFE.
 5. FOR A LIFE OPPRESSED WITH BUSINESS.
 6. AN HONOURABLE RETIREMENT.
 7. FOR A TRAVELLING LIFE.
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I. RULES FOR A WISE LIFE.

To be wise is proper for man, who is the image of God. Do you therefore, if you be wise; nay, that you may be wise—

1. Whatsoever you are doing and whatsoever you may do, look forward to the end, and consider the means to that end, and learn accurate modes of using the appointed means, lest you with your means, fail; as very often happens, when means supplied by Divine benevolence, perish through human stupidity, and fail of their object. In every matter consider those three things and all things appertaining thereto.

2. Remember, however, that the ends of things, the means, and the modes of things depend, on your part, not on idle speculation, but on use. Truly to have power of or to understand any thing is vain, unless you use it.

Therefore,

(a.) Whatever you know to be good, to that, as to your main object, direct your attention.

(b.) Whatever you see contributes to the attainment of your object, seize it, hold it, press (urge) it.

(c.) Whatever you urge, beware you do so with the greatest circumspection, that you may not urge in vain.

Thus will you never be disappointed in your wish ; unless, perhaps God, designing otherwise, opposes insuperable barriers to you. But in this case there is ready the consolation, that you are not deprived of the benefit through your own fault ; but, it seems good to God to exercise your patience for reasons known to Himself, although unknown to you.

3. And, inasmuch as your life constitutes the entire circumference of all your actions, so dispose this (your life) in respect of every particular purpose, that you, at all times, may have the end of life before your eyes, and unceasingly direct your attention to that end in every thing.

Now, what is the end of our life to which it is wisdom to direct our attention ? This God Himself teaches (Deut. xxxii. 29), " Oh that they were wise, that they understood and looked forward to their last things." Behold, then, ultimate wisdom, the sum of which is to look forward to the ultimate end. What is the ultimate end, unless it be eternity ? For that is ultimate beyond which nothing is given. But beyond all things here in this world, something further is always given. From nativity man comes to life ; from life he goes to death—hence to the resurrection—then begins interminable life, from which there will be no exit, and, consequently, beyond which nothing is given. Therefore eternity itself is our last end, beyond which nothing remains. Hence, to begin forthwith to look forward, provide for this end, and to arrange every intermediate thing with regard to this, is true wisdom. Consequently they, who only care for intermediate things, and forget ultimate objects, are foolish ; nay, ruinously foolish, inasmuch as they seize on means without an end, so that,

failing of eternal blessedness, they fall into everlasting destruction.

Remember, therefore,

1. That the object of your life be, to be prepared for eternity. Unless you look forward to this, you lose your life entirely, and then you had better never have been born.

2. Inasmuch, however, as man comes not to eternity unless through death, during your whole life prepare yourself for death—that it may be blessed to you, and not swallow you up, but only introduce you to eternity.

3. Now, inasmuch as man comes not to a good death unless through a good life; so act throughout your whole life, that you may live well, *i.e.*, holily, according to the will of Him, who is the arbiter of life and death; and has appointed life for the good—for the bad, death.

4. And since man attains not to a good life, except from continued practice (he who is accustomed to evil is no more able to change his moral conduct than the Ethiopian his skin, Jer. xiii. 23), inasmuch as usage passes into (becomes) nature—throughout your whole life so act, that you avoid whatever is evil (1 Thess. v. 22); and, again, “whatever things are in good repute, and whatever is virtuous, and whatever is praiseworthy, ponder these things.” (Philip. iv. 8.)

5. And inasmuch as none is able to follow good and avoid evil, except him who knows what is good and what is evil—for there is no desire of an unknown good and no dread of an unknown evil—throughout your whole life, you must so act that you conform not to this age, but be transformed in newness of your mind; and that you prove what is the good, and pleasing, and perfect will of God. (Rom. xii. 2.)

6. Forasmuch as the thoughts of mortals are timid, and our forethoughts uncertain (Wis. ix. 14), throughout your whole life you must so act that, with fear and trembling (Philip. ii. 12), you work out your salvation, not only shud-

dering at sins, so that you admit them not ; but with respect to your good deeds themselves ; fearing lest they be good only in opinion, from admixture of hypocrisy, or precipitate you into a pharisaical complaisance with yourself. Therefore you shall think no anchor securely fixed, except in the mercy of God and the merit of Christ—safe under this shield, provided your own will be entirely resigned, and all confidence in yourself and every other creature laid aside, you deliver up to God alone the decision respecting you in this life and for eternity.

Summarily—Live while you live as if about to die, in order that you may die, when you come to die, as if you were about to live. Alas for those who rise again to death ! If you wish to rise again to life, you must be careful that you die not in your death. If you wish not to die in death, before death you must blunt the stings of death, which are sins. (1 Cor. xv. 56.) Now sins will die before you, if you make it your aim that Christ live in you (Gal. ii. 20), for Christ is the fountain of life, and will spring up in you to life eternal, and death will not be death to you, as it was not to Him ; but a transit to life immortal.

This is true wisdom—the duly regulated ordinations of ends and means, from the first all the way to the last, and may God so guide you to an accurate observance of them, as that you err not from these courses and fall headlong.

II.—RULES OF A HARMONIOUS LIFE.

God is the fountain of all harmony. He made all things harmoniously ; especially man his own image, if we do not by our irrational acts disturb that harmony in the eyes and ears of God, of angels, and of such men as judge wisely of us. Therefore that you may not disturb this harmony, act thus :—

1. Always consider, do, and transact former things first—better things the rather—late things late—graceful things gracefully—loving things lovingly—divine things divinely—human things humanly, &c.; otherwise you throw into confusion yourself and such things.

2. Let your theories be always inseparable companions with practice. Whatever you know to be good, do it. Whatever good you do, consider whether you do it well, and wherefore you do it, that you be not like unto the Pharisees, who say and do not (Matt. xxiii. 3), or to the Samaritans, who worship and know not what (John iv. 22).

3. Let your internal things be in conformity with your external; *i. e.* whatever you desire to appear to be, be truly such, otherwise you will be an abomination to God, for His works are truth (Ps. cxi. 7), and He loves truth in us, and hates hypocrisy (Ps. li. 6). Woe to you, hypocrites! who are like to whitened sepulchres, which outwardly look beautiful to men, but inwardly are full of the bones of the dead (Matt. xxiii. 27).

4. Finally, let your thoughts, words, and deeds before men exactly agree; let the heart never dissent from the lip, nor the lip from the hand; a man with a double heart is a monster, &c.

III.—RULES OF A TRANQUIL LIFE.

The chief good in life is a soul tranquil and serene, and free from the storms of anxiety. That you may attain this blessed port, observe the following things:—

1. Labour to prevent whatever may disturb the mind or conscience, that you may have no share in such things. A multitude or diversity of occupations may disturb the mind, in which, whoever involves himself, will certainly find thorns, although occasional roses may appear; therefore that

may be tranquil, beware of being a man of many occupations—a busybody. Such things as appertain to yourself transact in silence; leave alone the things of others, and even in your own affairs be not scrupulously over curious and anxious about trifles. Transact those things which primarily concern your own safety and that of your household; commit the rest to God who exercises a care over us.

Now, the conscience is disturbed by the admission of sins. When the soul is conscious to itself of guilt, it blushes in the eyes of God and man, and trembles at the merited punishments; therefore, if you desire a tranquil conscience, strive that it may have nothing which it may object to you; *i. e.*, never, knowingly and willingly, admit any sins; and if you wish to avoid sins, avoid the occasions of them—such as depraved companions, suspected places, &c. He is an imprudent man, who, when he sees another has fallen anywhere, still goes directly there. Now we see daily that men on certain occasions fall and perish, and yet shall we not be careful?

2. If at any time you encounter occasions of any sin, fortify the mind that you may not succumb, but come off victorious. Hence, there is need of conflict and of the armour of virtue in this conflict for the preservation of an unstained conscience. Either, therefore, rescue yourself by flight—and deem as nothing what depraved companions may judge respecting you—or remain immovable; reflecting on the apostolical saying, “I am crucified to the world, and the world to me.” And inasmuch as it has not been said in vain, “occasions make no man bad, but evince what manner of man he is”—sand applied to fire does not blaze—tow burns—when brought into temptation, reflect: If I consent to evil, I evince that I am evil, and that I have been a hypocrite; therefore I will persevere in my purpose of retaining my virtue. I shall not allow myself to be driven from it. Remember moreover that in sensual temptations,

flight is always safer than conflict ; and that Joseph acted wisely who, when a reasonable defence of his upright purpose did not suffice, chose rather to rescue himself by flight than to parley ; an enemy is cast out with less honour and with more danger than his entrance is prevented.

3. If at any time you must fight against vices and do not altogether escape the wounds of conscience, immediately recollect yourself, and instantly cast out the nest which satan is beginning to build within you ; that is, immediately, at the very beginning of sin, forthwith have recourse to penitence, before the horror of sin expire, and the deadly poison become sweet, and conscience begin to die. Whoever knowingly and willingly accustoms himself to sin, surrenders to the devil his hands and feet to be so bound by the chains of evil custom, that he cannot set himself free, although he wish for it (2 Tim. ii. 25, 26). Let the following lines be a perpetual law to you :

Withstand beginnings : Medicine comes too late,
When in the mortal frame, through long delays,
Diseases have seized hold upon the vitals.

There is no refuge from storms to a conscience disturbed with sin, except the port of penitence ; more easily reached if you have not departed far ; with greater difficulty, even with the danger of being swallowed up, if you have been carried far away. Never, therefore, commit sin because of the hope of becoming penitent, it being uncertain whether you may be able to do this ; for those sinning spontaneously of their own mere motion, are wont to be forsaken by the Spirit of God, and without this guide to penitence, they arrive not at penitence (Heb. xii. 17). Think on this likewise, that it is better that a vessel never be soiled than that it be to be cleansed, and that it is better not to be wounded than to have to be cured, and better to exclude an enemy from the interior of a kingdom, than to wish to expel him

when admitted and laying all things waste, &c.; inasmuch as it is easier and safer.

4. Summarily—Forasmuch as this world is a scene of inquietudes, and we live here in a tumult of affairs, in order that as far as possible you may be free from anxiety, if not altogether tranquil, act thus :

(1.) Commune more with God than with men ; let Him be your internal delight.

(2.) Attend more to yourself than to others ; that is, transact your own affairs, not the affairs of others ; and do you yourself take charge of yourself rather than commit that charge to others ; and finally, depend rather upon yourself than upon others. I repeat, accustom not yourself to depend upon others—mark this well. Let your industry in your own affairs, your consciousness of righteous purposes, and your confidence in God be your sacred anchor.

(3.) Always pay more attention to the mind than to the body. It has been rightly said by Epictetus, “ The things which appertain to the body ought to be performed incidentally ; the things appertaining to the mind are worthy of fixed care ;” for we have the body from the earth, and it ought not to be more valued than vessels of clay, whereas the soul is from God, therefore greater (in value) than the world, and ought to be highly prized, purely preserved, and restored to God unstained. If you lose the soul, the whole world will not suffice for its redemption ; therefore, let the body serve, the soul govern ; to which, if you give the sceptre and allow it freely to use the body, you will become sovereign of your own actions, and numberless troubles that commonly arise from excessive care of the body, will be diminished to you.

These are the methods of true tranquillity, which if you adopt, nothing will easily disturb you through your own fault. Whatever evil may arise from another, or from the sufferance of God, who rarely permits his own to be with-

out trials of some kind, inasmuch as He knows that they are made perfect through the exercises of virtues and patience, will issue in an increase of joy, and therefore in a greater security of mind. You will be happy if you confine yourself within these barriers.

IV.—RULES OF AN ACTIVE LIFE.

We are born for business, therefore an active life is truly life. Idleness is the sepulchre of a living man. By how much the more excellent any creature is, by so much the more active it is; as is evident in the case of angels, of the sun, and of the heavenly bodies—which are in perpetual motion—so also are the fountains always sending forth waters, and the rivers carrying these waters hither and thither for human uses. On the contrary, by how much the more torpid anything is, by so much the more useless it is; as a stone, clay, ditch, &c.; do you therefore, that you may not be a stone or a useless weight of earth, but an active sun always shining, or an angel always ministering in place of God to men, use all your efforts. What now must be observed in this matter?

1. Whatever you see ought to be done by you, provided you know the means of effecting it, and the prudent use of the means, dare to engage in it. It is better to fail in good attempts, as sometimes happens, than to neglect occasions of increasing any good things.

2. Whatever you are able to expedite yourself, never wait for others. Thus relying more on your own industry than on that of another; for it often happens that before you have related the matter to another, and he has perceived it, deliberated upon it, and prepared himself for it, you yourself might have done it; therefore advance right on without turnings and windings.

3. Whatever you are able to do to-day defer not till to-morrow. They who are prepared, are always injured by delay; the raven, word *cras, cras* (to-morrow, to-morrow) is the manifest ruin of business.

4. To whomsoever you can do good, rejoice to do it, even though it were to the whole world. It has justly been stated that it is the property of excellent natures to minister and do good; therefore, if you can, imitate God, who ministers to all, or an angel who ministers to many. Regard as among abominable things, the being torpid or useless.

5. No day without a line. You see how rapidly the machine of the world moves, whilst we act slowly; therefore, be not thou sluggish in business: yet I do not wish you to be precipitate; consider what is necessary to be done, and having considered the matter, speedily engage in it, that no sun may ever shine on you in vain. Enquiry will be made how all the time granted to us has been expended.

V.—RULES OF A LIFE BURDENED WITH BUSINESS.

It sometimes happens that the active are overwhelmed with business, still activity of life must not on that account be abandoned; for compendious means are available, by which distressing cares may be alleviated. That you may know such, remember these rules:—

1. Put value on time, so that you permit no portion of it to escape uselessly—so, more ample spaces of time of acting will be to you, than to another who knows not how to seize occasions.

2. He by whom many things must be done, must express himself in few words. Understand this both actively and passively—that is, both he himself, when he must speak,

should express himself in few words, and request that any other who may wish to address him, should briefly deliver himself. The discourse of the wise is short—talk beyond what is necessary, appertains to idleness.

3. Whatever can be expedited more quickly by the aid of others, fail not to employ them ; thus business will proceed more quickly—more hands more work—provided that order be preserved, so that your fellow-labourers may not impede or disturb you or themselves.

4. However, that you may be more active for labours, occasionally relax the mind, or change the occupation. That which is deprived of alternate rest, is not durable—an over-stretched bow, snaps.

VI.—RULES OF A LIFE OF HONORABLE RETIREMENT.

If life happens to be free from labours, it is not necessary to do nothing—that is, to be torpid, and uselessly destroy time—neither is it requisite to have recourse to unprofitable games, such as cards, dice, &c. Something ought to be done which may refresh the body as well as the mind. This may be done by walking, by conversing with friends, by transacting affairs connected with your household.

VII.—RULES TO BE OBSERVED BY ONE ABOUT TO TRAVEL.

I see you have a desire for travelling, and it has been proposed by your friends ; what, therefore, you should especially attend to I will state in few words:—

1. Above all things you will reflect, why you undertake the labour of travelling—certainly not to see new mount-

ains, new plains, forests, rivers, or seas, or men, or beasts, for you can see such things at home. In this sense it has been rightly said by a certain writer : " Whosoever hath seen one man, one ox, one mountain, one forest, one city, &c. has seen the world, for the world is composed of such ;" but that you may see, and hear, and converse with men learned and wise, from whose conversation you may obtain augmentations of wisdom and virtue :

2. Therefore, when you go to strangers, you will not go, as it were, into another world—the whole world is the fatherland of a wise man—but, as to a school which God has willed to be common—so that we, as spectators and hearers by mutual sight and intercourse, may exercise and improve each other.

3. You will reflect, inasmuch as you cannot go beyond the world, that you will find the world everywhere, that is, vain and profane men, and a mixture of good and bad ; therefore, you must fortify your breast against the poisoned weapon of enticements to evil and of corruptions, by assuming the shield of a firm resolve to attend to nothing, to admire nothing, to love nothing, and to bring nothing home but what may become some accession of virtue and of felicity to yourself and to your friends, to your country and to the church of God.

4. You will depart from the sight of your parents and your country, not, however, like Cain, a deserter from the face of God, to seek a field for impiety and licentiousness. For wherever you go, the Eyes of God will accompany you, and along with these, blessings or curses will overtake you. But as the younger Tobias travelled to gratify the will of his parents and to seek among strangers everywhere treasures of wisdom and of good examples ; you, therefore go, with a pure intention, with a mind, and heart, and all your senses chaste, and so the angel of the Lord will accompany you, and conduct you, and lead you back.

Summarily—

Wherever you are

Live to God, who is the giver of your life.

Live to Conscience, which is the life of your life.

Live to Fame, which is the life after your life.

Therefore, may the Spirit of Christ be with you, so that you may rightly perceive and observe all these things:—and, from my heart, I desire the salvation of your soul, and all prosperity to your affairs, and that the perpetual splendour of your family, in church and country, may be transmitted through you to after ages.

Your most affectionate,

COMENIUS.

9th of June, 1645, the day on which you depart from me.





